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ABSTRACT

A demographics-based approach to conjecture on the social future suggests several factors that bear on the social context of education in the 1980s, including shifts in population, economic activity, and political power, implications of the youth decline, possible intergenerational changes in fertility and women's employment, and the cyclical tendencies of national social policy. Results of futures studies indicate that in terms of education: (1) interest in the schools will be keen; (2) many high schools will face several contraction problems; (3) there will be a greater state-level role in school funding; and (4) the problem of an aging faculty, particularly in colleges, will be of increasing concern in areas with severe enrollment decline. (Author)

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HUDSON INSTITUTE

PAPER

ASPECTS OF THE FUTURE ENVIRONMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

By

Jane Newitt

HI-2992-P April 13, 1979

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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SUBJECT: ASPECTS OF THE FUTURE ENVIRONMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

PURPOSE: Hearings, Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, Committee on Education and Labor, April 25, 1979

AUTHOR: Jane Newitt, Hudson Institute

I. AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND

My view of the future environment of the schools is shaped by eleven years' professional experience in policy analysis and futures studies at Hudson Institute; by an academic background in history (rather than social science); and by eighteen years as the mother of public-school children, nearly all of it in the suburbs of the New York Metropolitan Area.

Although futures studies in the education area have occupied relatively little of my time, I have been: (a) editor of (and contributor to) Future Trends in Education Policy (Cambridge, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1979); (b) organizer of the NIE-sponsored conference on the future of the public schools at which the papers in Future Trends were presented (September 1977); (c) supervisor of a study of recent elementary-secondary school trends, conducted in 1973-74 by Frank E. Armbruster of Hudson Institute; (d) author and co-author of essays on the future of the community education movement and its relationships with local social services; and (e) author of an analysis of higher education's prospects, just completed for a Hudson corporate client. Also, I am now beginning a brief futures study for New York State (Department of State) on "the implications of school enrollment decline for everything else."

My primary professional interests in recent years have been (a) U.S. social-policy trend analysis; and (b) differentiation of U.S. regional, state, and local social trends and prospects. (I treat "social trends" as a bundle of hyphenated concepts: e.g., socio-economic, socio-political, socio-demographic.)

II. ANALYTICAL APPROACH

I use a demographics-based approach to conjecture on the social future, since (a) trends in age distribution of the already-born provide our best clue to the character of nonrepetitive social change; and (b) the roller-coaster pattern of past birth rates makes age-distribution changes important over periods as brief as a decade.

I distinguish four age-segments of the adult population: young adults, nesting age, empty-nest age, and elderly. These roughly conform to the ages under-25, 25-44, 45-64, and 65+. I assume substantial persistence of the major attributes of these ages, as revealed by historical analysis of Census, attitude-survey, and other data. I modify this picture of American society at a given future time by reference to historical evidence of linear, cyclical, and intergenerational patterns of attitude and behavior change in American society. As a participant in one of the country's oldest and broadest-ranging futures studies program, I also draw on (and contribute to) Hudson studies of other aspects of the future.

My studies emphasize improving the user's ability to think about the uncertainties of the future. Although I have a good record for predicting social trends, I have not found predictive approaches to futures studies to be effective, since there is no objective way for the reader/listener to evaluate the accuracy of a forecast at the time it is made. I trust that other contributors to this hearing will provide the Subcommittee with an adequate range of views on the social future, since my own brief presentation of "best guesses" cannot serve this purpose.

III. PRESENTATION

A. Introduction

Hudson Institute's economic analysts see the 1973-83 decade as dominated by major U.S. structural adjustments associated with changing conditions in the global economy and extremely rapid growth of the domestic work force. This stressful context has amplified the effects of U.S. regional trends in the location of population and economic activity, resulting in exceptional problems for the older, more densely populated, earliest-industrialized, and historically most affluent parts of the country.

The Institute's analysis projects a lessening of stresses on the national economy by the mid-1980s, with a temporary rise in growth rates that will "pull up" the lagging regions. Subsequently, the types of forces that are termed "social limits to growth" are expected to slow economic growth in the 1990s and thereafter. As a historian, the author of this presentation is familiar with similar long-range expectations dating back to the 1920s, the 1890s, and in some respects the 1850s or earlier. Thus I utilize my colleagues' economic scenario for my 5-15 year social forecasting, but I expect that technological, cultural and global changes will produce periods of vigorous economic growth in the future and, indeed, within the next quarter-century. The social trends that I find reasonably persuasive for the next 5-15 years are harmonious with Hudson's long-range economic forecast, but I part company with most experts thereafter.

I will sketch a demographics-based social forecast for the 1980s, with a quick look at the rest of the next quarter-century. I will then discuss a set of topics that expand on elements of the basic scenario that reflect areas of concentration in my recent work and thinking. This section of the presentation (Section III-C) will deal with: (1) Shifts in population, economic activity, and political power; (2) Implications of the youth decline; (3) Intergenerational change: fertility, women's employment; and (4) The next social policy cycle. Because of my principle for selection, these topics bear varying degrees of importance to the future of elementary and secondary education. All, I believe, are important, but I have chosen them on the basis of having something to say rather than of touching all the key bases. Finally, the paper concludes with a few comments on "implications."

B. Basic Expectations for the American Culture: A Demographics-Based Forecast

During the 1980s, the most rapidly growing segment of the already-born population will be in its late thirties and early forties, and the largest age cohorts will shift from ages 15-24 to ages 25-34. The elderly population will rank after ages 30-34 in its growth rate, but this rate will be slowing; and cultural differences between elderly and younger adults will be dwindling--many fewer foreign-born old people, many more high school graduates, many fewer rural residents, and many people who moved to the suburbs after World War II.

The empty-nest age group (ages 45-64) will come to be dominated by the "Depression babies." Thus, it will grow very slowly and some of its age segments may slightly decline. Historically, the small numbers of the generation now reaching this age have been associated with high earnings relative to other age groups, but the movement of the Big Generation* into the experienced-worker category will surely generate negative attitudes about older workers who, on average, will be less-educated, less-vigorous, and higher-paid than those of the Big Generation. As a result, despite today's concern about the future financial viability of pension systems, both management and labor are likely to see great advantage, by the late 1980s, in liberalizing early retirement. These perceptions will vary by industry, but the problem of a "superannuated" work force will crystallize first and perhaps most forcefully in the schools and colleges.

This follows from past hiring patterns and from the fact that the already-born cohorts from ages 20-24 on down will be dwindling rapidly. The high-school age population (ages 14-17) is projected to drop nationally

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* I have borrowed this replacement for the outmoded "baby boom" term from the Canadian futurist John Kettle, and I will use the term Small Generation to denote the "baby bust" cohorts.

by 25% from its peak in the mid-1970s to the trough of 1990, and the experience of particular states and school districts will include much greater declines.*

Recent developments suggest that the junior high or middle school age group will be stable in numbers by the late 1980s; and a demographic basis for expecting renewed growth at the elementary ages is provided by the huge numbers of women now entering child-bearing age. However, this same line of reasoning says that birth rates will start a new, sharp, and protracted decline when the Small Generation comes to dominate the child-bearing ages in the 1990s. In other words, unless the near-future rise in the crude birth rate is accompanied or followed by a sustained rise in fertility--more babies per family for the Small Generation--the elementary schools a decade hence will be enjoying the calm before a new era of contraction problems.

I am impressed by the theories which suggest that the Small Generation may marry earlier, have babies younger, and probably have many more three- and four-child families than the Big Generation,** so that the number of children entering school may not be much lower in 2000 than in 1990, and could be higher. However, even with the information that will be available in 1990, it will not be possible to be confident of this or any other ten-year forecast. The best one can say at this point is that history supports two theories of fertility trend: (1) a very long-term decline with one flukish interruption in the middle of the twentieth century; and (2) a long-term decline that has been replaced (or overlaid) by intergenerational oscillation between larger and smaller family size. On the other hand, the absence of at least a modest baby boom in the 1980s would surprise nearly everyone. The big question mark is its size and what happens thereafter.

However, unless the Small Generation attracts attention to itself in unforeseen ways, its immediate elders will define the character of American society in the 1980s, and my social scenario centers on them. By the end of that decade, the Big Generation will be concentrated in the 25-44 age range. The numbers of people at the bottom of this range will be dropping; the numbers at the top will be considerably fewer but rising very rapidly. Comparing 1990 to 1979, the Census Bureau's projections present the following picture:

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*See also Section C-2 below.

**See also Section C-3 below.

AGES	% CHANGE	NOS.: 1979	NOS.: 1990
25-29	+ 9.3%	18,451,000	20,169,000
30-34	+26.3%	16,588,000	20,917,000
35-39	+41.8%	13,587,000	19,261,000
40-44	+50.7%	11,503,000	17,331,000.

Thus a demographics-based social forecast for the next 10-15 years sees a population centered at the "nesting age." On precedent, this suggests such characteristics as the following:

-- preoccupation with career, family, and local concerns;

-- home ownership, heavy mortgages, high sensitivity to taxes;

-- excellent physical health, but anxiety about the early imprint of aging on appearance, stamina, and virility;

-- a more experienced, more serious work force, with rising but not yet peak earnings.

In addition, the size and/or history (to date) of the Big Generation invites the following conjectures:

-- an exceptional sense of generational identity, with little respect for people over 50, or for the decade's "youth culture";

-- few childless families, but many 1-2 child families, and many who deferred parenthood until they were pushing (or past) thirty;

-- more emphasis in the family on "parents' rights," less on being buddy to one's children;

-- persistent ideological commitment to the natural and simple, to zero (or slow) population growth, "small is beautiful," "do your own thing"; but some forms of "older but wiser" reactions against one's youthful naivete or idealism; and

-- a high incidence of mental health problems, owing to:

- exceptional difficulties in "transitioning" from a youthful to an adult self-image;

- conflicts between a self-centered, adult-centered lifestyle preference and the obligations of parenthood;

- continuing problems resulting from youthful acculturation to the use of drugs to alter one's moods;

- too many highly educated and experienced workers competing for too few promotion opportunities;

- budgetary strains, resulting from the expected high rates of inflation, and the special pressures that large numbers at homeowning age will apply to housing prices.

Thus there are ambiguities to a demographics-based forecast. The age distribution suggests a strengthening of labor productivity, and an apolitical, moderately conservative culture, dominated by families with children and heavy mortgages. But generational characteristics suggest a less child-centered culture, with parents more psychologically "distanced" from their children. The scenario has an undercurrent of malaise, indicating a potential for social instability, centered on the middle class rather than the disadvantaged. Some social analysts believe that a radical alienation from work may emerge; a revitalized labor movement may press for substantial increments to leisure--both as a good in itself and a means to open up advancement opportunities. Government would of course also be drawn into this quest.

By contrast, I see the Big Generation as locked into family responsibilities and mistrustful of government. Thus the "instability" may continue to express itself in subtle and diverse ways rather than quickly producing a distinctive political or social movement. The likelihood of continuing population diffusion also seems to support this forecast. Proportionally, the population will be increasingly concentrated in suburbs, exurbs, and the environs of growing smaller cities. On the other hand, the sheer numbers at the nesting age will also provide a new lease on life for aging neighborhoods of single-family homes in many cities and inner suburbs. (But neighborhoods dominated by apartment housing will enter an era of hard times when the young-adult population starts to plummet in the late 1980s, unless they are situated to attract a slow-growing "empty nest" and elderly clientele.)*

Regional shifts also connote a relatively conservative polity, even after the current "tax revolt" runs its course. The South and West will have a majority in the Congress after the 1980 reapportionment. The urbanizing South may become more liberal in its views about federal social spending, but (with New York State destined to lose four or five Representatives, and major losses by cities nationwide) northern and urban delegations will be hard-put to shape federal legislation to their advantage, and may shift

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*See also Section C-1.

their efforts to blocking unfavorable legislation. A perceived need for cost control in local and state government will also last longer in the heavily taxed, economically lagging parts of the North.

Third, a "slow motion decade" politically is suggested by the tendency of national social policy to follow thirty-year cycles in its vitality, with peak periods of innovation and excitement followed by protracted "hangovers"--in the post-Reconstruction years, the 1920s, the 1950s, and again today. Although external factors have been associated with these cycles, they also have an inherent logic, leading me to guess that today's skepticism about "big government," its dwindling appetite for issue politics, and its greatly reduced sense of guilt about society's provision for the disadvantaged will be conspicuous features of the society for most of the 'Eighties.*

However, just as today's American culture is strikingly different from that of the late 1960s (and the late 1960s' from the 1950s'), the late 1980s' will differ from today's. Rising levels of affluence and education have greatly increased the proportion of the population that is sensitive to fashions in attitudes and lifestyles; and generational or "half-generational" change has been closely associated with these shifts of fashion in the past. Thus an important question to ask is how these changes may evolve from the ingredients that are observable today. Perhaps regionalism and localism are one key to this puzzle, with an appetite for social experiment first reviving at the grass roots. An additional possibility is a turnaround in married women's employment trend, associated with such developments as the protracted drought in teaching jobs, intergenerational attitude change (with higher fertility) by the Small Generation, and a tendency by Big Generation women who have juggled job and family while their children are young to take life easier once their husbands' earnings rise and experience tarnishes the allure of a personal career. I call this possibility "The New Domesticity" but the media would give it a snazzier name, and it would entail a well-rounded rather than a narrowly domestic image of the good life.

Such an image would appeal to men as well as women, given the youthful acculturation of the Big Generation and its experience of "generational crowding" in the work place. If wives give it principal expression, an important reason for this limitation will be the continuing high rates of inflation that my economist colleagues expect. The greater the erosion of ability to save for a home, for one's children's education, and other long-term purposes, the more important one's future earnings become. In this situation, husband-wife differences in the longer-term economic implications of reacting against the stressful or dead-end job conditions associated with a glut of experienced (and especially college-educated) workers seem likely to be very important. Most married men will favor more earnings over more leisure.

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*See also Section C-4.

On the other hand, the unique situation of the schools--with a flat employment prospect; a very large, educated female work force; unusually short formal work hours and long vacations; and, for historical reasons, a teaching force that will be aging much more rapidly than the total work force--is likely to produce very strong attraction to leisure ideologies, considerable experimentation with shared jobs, early retirement, and other means to rejuvenate the staff age-mix, and a tendency to assume that the society at large is (or should be) moving along these lines much more rapidly than it is.

A Longer View

The scenario just described is not credible past the mid-1990s. If one "looks" twenty-five years ahead--to 2005--a forecast based on the age trend of the already-born population acquires new and troubling aspects. Many industries will face the problem of a superannuated work force. Many neighborhoods will find no takers for the homes the Big Generation vacates. And an era of acrimonious age-group politics is likely, as the staggering pension costs of the 2010-30 period loom ever closer. These frictions will be more severe if the schools indoctrinate the younger generation to expect more leisure (and "work enrichment") as its right and as the logical next step of social progress.

Elements of this future will seem less consequential if the prospect of a smaller work force spurs productivity gains; if new technologies and objectives--ocean and space development, the improvement of intelligence, the reconstruction of inner cities--add excitement to the world of work; or if an intervening rise in fertility promises to swell the ranks of young workers. On the other hand, they will seem more oppressive if none of these things occur and intervening global developments require a large army and heavy national-security expenditures. If none of these things occur, and population continues to gravitate to warmer climates and small job centers that offer the lifestyle most Americans prefer, decline, disinvestment, and abandonment will begin in the aging suburbs and suburb-like neighborhoods of older cities, even though the nation as a whole will still be a generation away from zero population growth (assuming persistence of current fertility rates).

Thus the sparse clues that a demographics-based forecast supplies for the more distant future suggest that major changes in American attitudes, behavior, and social philosophy have to occur by the turn of the century. Some of these changes may modify the demographic trend or its economic implications. Others will constitute adaptations to it. But we will move from a 1980-95 period when surprising "externalities" may derail the demographic prospect of a stable, productive, and prosperous society to a period that cannot be viewed optimistically from today's perspective, and that most Americans seem to prefer not to think about.

C. Special Topics

1. Shifts in Population, Economic Activity, Political Power

The first half of the period since World War II saw heavy migration to the West, moderate migration to the northern manufacturing belt, out-migration from the South and the rural Midwest, and rapid suburbanization. The second half saw reversal of the North-South flow, slower growth rates for California, intensified population losses for many large cities, slow growth for inner suburbs, and more rapid growth for outer suburbs, exurbs, and many smaller urban places outside metropolitan areas. In the 1970s, the long fertility decline has turned net out-migration into actual losses for some suburban counties and, indeed, for entire states in the Northeast. But generally the adult population and number of households has kept growing in such places, owing to the movement of the Big Generation into the young adult and nesting age categories.

Employment "shifts" have been important, but these are not characteristically literal geographical shifts of employers. Mainly the less attractive areas of the country for business have experienced more "deaths" and contractions of firms, and the more attractive have had more "births" and "expansions." Also, the long-term growth of less populous parts of the U.S. has progressively established the base for diversified economic opportunities; and economic and technological trends have allowed more jobs to be sited where people want to live. The attitude surveys consistently show overwhelming preference for small towns or "open country," with suburbs a poor third and very limited appeal for high-density city life. These attitudes are not new, but there has been a great increase in the opportunity to live at lower densities without excessive commuting distances and without sacrificing earnings, occupational choice, and promotion opportunities. Meanwhile, television prevents cultural monotony and isolation, and preference for outdoor sports and activities can be indulged.

In this process, high-density cities have fallen on hard times. Philadelphia's population is back to its 1920s level, Boston's to 1910. And New York City, which recovered its 1950s losses during the 1960s, has recently lost population at rates as high as 100,000 a year.

Of the nation's one hundred most populous counties, forty-three experienced population decline, 1970-75, with the Northeast accounting for half the losers. Forty-four of the nation's 277 SMSAs lost population, including 37% of the thirty largest, all of them in the "frostbelt" except for Los Angeles and Seattle. Forty-four percent of the 907 cities with population of 25,000 had losses; of the top three hundred, fifty-four percent. The Northeast accounted for 31% of the losing cities in the 25,000+ size range, and for only 11% of the gainers. The Midwest housed 25% of the gainers and 40% of the losers.

On the other hand, among counties ranking below the top one hundred, the Northeast accounted for a higher proportion of those that gained population than it did of all counties these sizes. And, although New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut housed 37% of the declining SMSAs and only 7% of the growing ones, SMSAs that are at the periphery of the New York Metropolitan Region--New Haven, New London, Danbury, Poughkeepsie, New Brunswick, Asbury Park--all gained population between 1970 and 1975. Evidently, the forces spurring exurbanization have an important role apart from the "sunbelt shift."

The Prospect

The age groups that are sometimes drawn to big-city life are young adults, with a prospect of rapidly reduced numbers, 1980-95; and the empty-nest middle class whose numbers will grow slowly as the "Depression babies" reach this age. The age group that stays in cities--the elderly--is "shifting" rapidly to the suburbs, somewhat by actual migration but mostly by the aging in place of the generation that moved to the suburbs after World War II. A majority of metropolitan-area elderly people now live in suburbs, and the proportion will grow rapidly.

Over the next fifteen years, however, the heavy demand for single-family homes by the Big Generation will give a new lease on life to aging residential neighborhoods in cities and inner suburbs. The weak sector--vulnerable to continuing disinvestment, abandonment, vandalism, and arson--will be the middle- and high-rise apartment areas that occupy a significant amount of space in only a few large cities. Shrinkage of the young-adult housing market will accelerate this trend after the mid-1980s, but row-house and suburb-like residential areas of cities should do well until the turn of the century unless factors other than the age-distribution trend prove more important. Some cities--notably New York and Cleveland--which face a decade or more of fiscal austerity may be plagued by serious municipal labor problems, racial and other hostilities, welfare riots, deteriorating public services, and a "maintenance crisis" (buildings, streets, sub-surface conduits) that could trigger heavy losses of people and jobs. These cities will face politically and ethically difficult choices in allocation of scarce resources; and the reflection of past migration trends in the composition of future Congresses does not offer much promise of federal aid. But cities with lesser fiscal problems and a high proportion of their housing in one-family structures will profit from the demographic accident of the Big Generation's housing needs. Many "gray areas" will revive during the next fifteen years, but most will be living on borrowed time, or so a head-count of the Small Generation suggests.

Under some circumstances--such as protracted energy shortages, or a continuing widening of the Northeast's per capita state-local tax disadvantages--the sunbelt shift could intensify. Although rapid growth in the postwar decades has tended to be self-curbing, new growth areas will continue to emerge in all parts of the country, as the interstate highway

system gradually realizes its potential for multiplying Americans' locational choices.

A Longer View

The oldest model of metropolitan-region development was the wheel with a hub. Two more recent models (variants of one idea) are the doughnut or the set of concentric circles. My own guess is that metropolitan regions will instead become clusters of job centers with complex interrelationships and dwindling primacy for the central city that started the process. Some one-time central cities may have more out-commuters than in-commuters. Where there are drastic long-term central-city population declines, abandonment and clearance of unmarketable housing may eventually turn some large cities into several small cities, with suburbs and open land in between. Out-movement of jobs, allowing workers to live yet further out, will eventually produce job centers that have no economic dependency on the one-time central city.

These long-term tendencies will be strengthened if fertility rates average as low as in recent years, connoting a declining U.S. population by about 2030. In this case, the problem of superannuated, densely built urban housing that few people care to live in could begin to assume crisis proportions by the time the current "small generation" of children comes to dominate the home-owning ages. The boost to older neighborhoods supplied by the Big Generation should not allow this longer-term prospect to be obscured.

2. Implications of the Youth Decline

An average high school in an average place can expect a 25% drop in enrollment from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. Some districts may face a 40% drop; others may have little or none, or an increase.

The pass-through of the "baby bust" to the high schools could connote more serious problems, since, compared to the elementary schools, these schools are:

-- much more consolidated already, so that closures often require school-district mergers and/or long-distance busing;

-- much more specialized in faculty and curriculum, so that cutting staff quickly weakens offerings, in effect discriminating against some kinds of students; and

-- operating at a higher per-pupil cost and lower class size, so that taxpayer resistance to further changes in these directions may often be strong.

Other factors, such as "mainstreaming" and barrier-removal requirements for handicapped young people, and equal-opportunity requirements for girls' athletic programs, will also tend to press up costs generally, as will the rising proportion of teachers with high seniority pay.

Strong emphasis on preventing and re-enrolling dropouts will develop, but the same demographic trend that is shrinking enrollment will also tend to increase job opportunities and raise pay levels for teenagers, so that incentives to drop out will be strengthened. A countervailing trend will be persistent public pressures to stiffen promotion and graduation requirements: given willingness on the students' part, more kids will be taking longer to get through high school.

High school enrollment decline will extend the poor teaching job prospects to include many more men. (Only in southern and border states and Hawaii are a majority of high school teachers women.) Probably elementary school enrollment will be picking up almost everywhere by the mid-1980s, since higher fertility rates are not necessary for this development. However, in the absence of rising fertility (or local in-migration), the prospect will be a renewed drop in numbers of children in the "foreseeable" future, so that once-burnt, twice-shy school districts will be conservative about adding to staff.

The prolonged drought in teaching jobs will significantly reduce married women's job opportunities in suburban and exurban areas that are not job centers. Since two salaries will be necessary for most families to buy a new home, this development may depress housing construction in such areas. Also, most non-teaching jobs have hours that require some provision for care of the working mother's school-age children; and many women living in residential areas may have to commute greater distances to obtain a job. Additionally, there is already some evidence that the "glut" of college graduates on the job market is producing "bumping down": these graduates are taking jobs that less-trained people would ordinarily have, and a chain reaction results. Since, until recently almost a third of all college graduates (and half of women graduates) found their first job in teaching--and education majors still account for 30% of all graduate students--the implications of continuing school enrollment decline for the economy and society may deserve as much attention as the implications of socioeconomic change for the schools.

Since retail trade (including restaurants) accounts for half of all jobs of teenagers who are still in school, a 25% reduction in this labor pool may give downtown locations a greater commercial advantage relative to strip development and isolated suburban shipping centers. Merchants in outlying areas will have to induce more housewives and retired people to work for them, or figure out means to cut their labor needs. More generally, a rapid drop in numbers of entry-level workers is likely to result in more exporting of jobs to other countries and second thoughts on the part of U.S. unions about their insistence on exclusionary immigration policies.

Finally, high schools that are a quarter or, in some cases, a third empty will become more hospitable to shared uses of their kitchens, shops, media centers, and classrooms. Likewise, the quest to reduce dropouts will produce incentives for collaborative relationships with community services that deal with such correlates of dropping-out as poor family and neighborhood environment, drug abuse, delinquency, mental problems, and poverty.

Other opportunities for closer cooperation will develop in many areas with respect to the community colleges, especially where these are viewed as "the top of the K-14 ladder." Although two-year public colleges have been the most vigorously growing part of higher education (and a rosy prospect has been adduced on the basis of their 30% ages 25 and older student body), their increase in enrollment, 1976-78, has been substantially less than the National Center for Education Statistics had projected. Because these schools characteristically serve a small catch-basin area, they share the secondary schools' vulnerability to population shifts, with added vulnerability from partial dependency on tuition income in most states.

3. Intergenerational Change: Fertility, Women's Employment

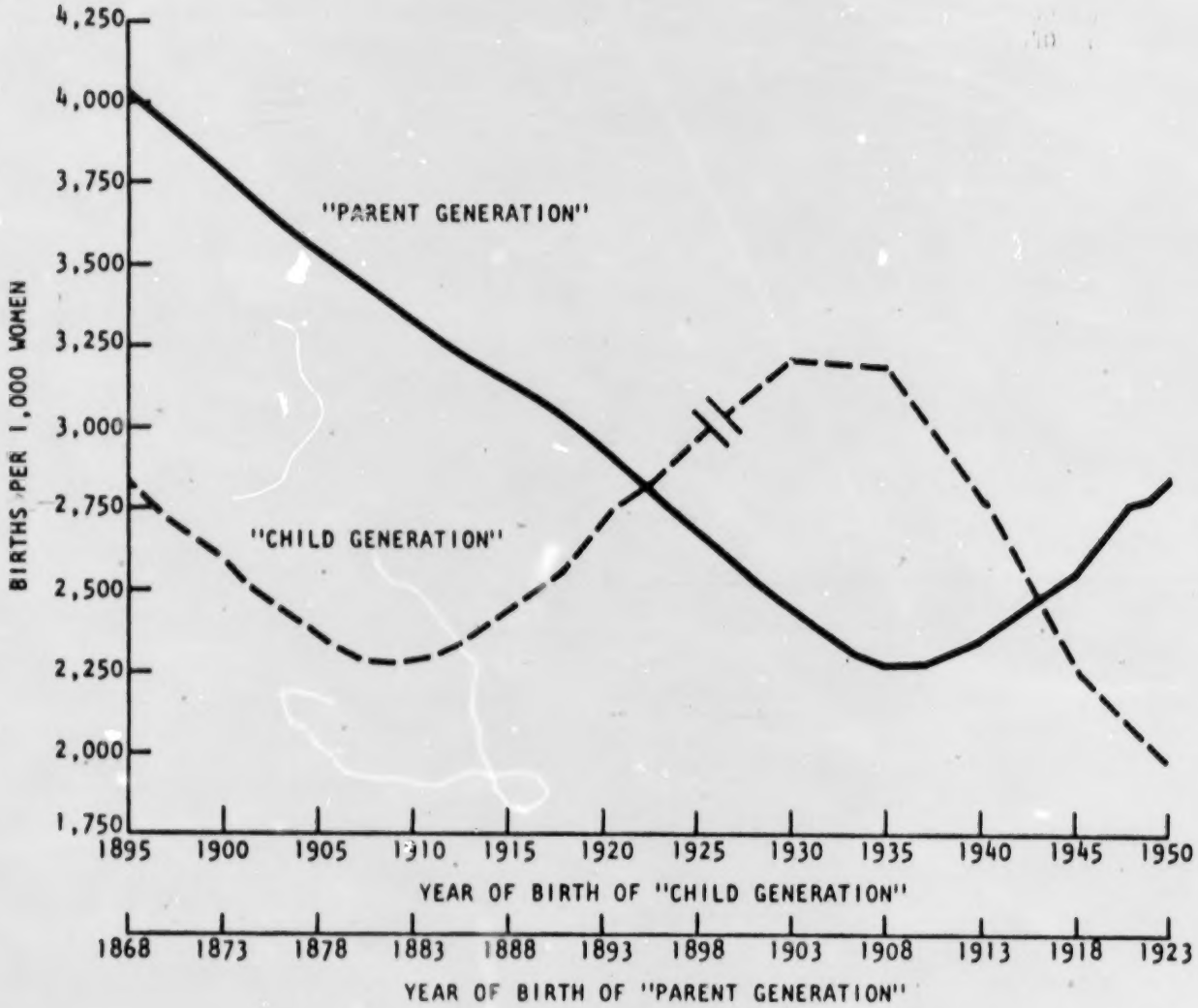
Figure 1 on the following page takes time to understand, but the basic message is that young people followed the same downward fertility trend as their parents' generation up until the cohort that was born around 1910. After that, Depression and war initiated a pattern of intergenerational contrasts, with the young adults who produced the postwar baby boom often explicitly favoring having three or four children "while we're young enough to enjoy them" in contrast to their own experience in one or two child Depression-era families.

As the next "small generation" moves through its childhood, a number of economic, demographic, and sociological theories suggest that its women will marry younger and have more babies. One argument, associated with the economist, Richard Easterlin, attributes the greater fecundity of small age cohorts to the higher relative wages they are able to command--suggesting a feeling of greater ability to afford children. Another argument notes that people who were born during a period of declining births have more males than females at the prime ages for marriage when they grow up, and this "bachelor surplus" results in earlier marriage and earlier childbearing for scarce females. My own view, as a member of the very fertile Depression-baby generation, is that people who grow up in small families think that larger ones would be more fun (and vice versa).

As noted in Section B, if family size does start to rise in the late 1980s, an intriguing question is the effect on married women's employment. Historically, women's employment has moved up, at varying rates, in good times and bad throughout this century. It rose rapidly in the 1960s when family size was still growing, and rapidly in the 1970s, when

Figure 6

CUMULATIVE FERTILITY AT AGE 49 FOR "PARENT GENERATIONS" BORN FROM 1868 TO 1923 AND FOR "CHILD GENERATIONS" BORN FROM 1895 TO 1950



NOTE: FERTILITY RATES ARE ESTIMATED FROM 1868 TO 1925 AND PROJECTED FROM 1926 TO 1950.

SOURCE: BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS, SERIES P-23, NO. 70, JULY 1978.

it was dropping. However, with three in five mothers of teenagers now employed, a potential exists for the same kind of intergenerational life-style reaction that the fertility trend has shown. In other words, there are now enough working mothers so that a tendency toward different choices by their daughters could produce a trend reversal.

One may question how many families can afford to have only one earner, but this same kind of argument was widely employed in the late 1940s to predict that the housing shortage would quickly terminate the baby boom. The power of a new conception of the good life is a force to conjure with, and the role of the media in shaping Americans' conceptions of the good life is biased in its nature toward evolution--i.e., the newsworthy.

A possible "New Domesticity" would entail elements of friction between the Big Generation and the Small Generation, since the former has been so strongly indoctrinated to oppose large families, and to regard three children as excessive. But this factor is easy to overstate. The fertility statistics show that the Big Generation is having later as well as fewer babies. This suggests substantial overlap between its late births and the Small Generation's earlier births, so that a broader age range of parents will be raising children at the same time, with somewhat differing philosophies and reactions to the experience but with a great deal in common. Also, as noted in Section B, many of the forty percent of mothers of children under six who are now employed may not remain motivated to maintain this pace indefinitely. Or these women, who are often part-timers, may welcome a "post-feminist" conception of the good life that dignifies remaining part-timers.

For a family, the decision to have three children instead of two (or two instead of one) can be made very casually if "everyone" is doing it. Although it has become common to dread the consequences, my own impression is that reaching zero population growth by means of a sequence of diminishing oscillations in fertility rate would be the least painful approach to this ultimately necessary goal.

4. The Next Social Policy Cycle

National social policy has discernible peaks in the Reconstruction era, the Progressive era, the New Deal, and the 1960s. Each of these peaks was eroded by disillusionments, reaction against the pace of change, and reaction against dramatic constructions of social issues, rights, and obligations. Each was followed by a period of Congressional inability to enact much important new social legislation, and by a period when the affluent and educated people who dominate our sense of social history were preoccupied with other matters.

There are many justifications for a cyclical pattern in social policy--a logical sequence of ingestion and digestion (with indigestion in the middle); a safeguard to federalism and pluralism more generally; and a

cooling off of the ideological polarizations that are stimulated by issue politics and aggressive innovation.

In any case, cycles of roughly thirty years have existed, and although external events have affected their timing and character, internal dynamics may well suffice to explain their existence. If so, the 1980s will be a "slow-motion" decade for national social policy, with the current "tax revolt" gradually giving way to preoccupation with personal, familial, and local interests rather than to a new era of Potomac fever. It is also possible that the perceived importance of foreign policy may rise relative to social policy; and it is likely that economic problems will cause pressures for government cost control to last much longer in New York, Massachusetts, and a few other states.

This prospect for the 1980s is supported not only by a cyclical theory but by my interpretation of the age-demographics; and I also suspect that the geographical shifts in the Congress will make it more difficult to design social legislation that can command a majority. However, a cyclical theory says that new issue formulations and excitement should emerge in the late 1980s or early 1990s. In Section B, I suggested three possible aspects of this new cycle: (1) regionalism, localism, and hostility to "bigness"; (2) leisure and work-enrichment ideologies; and (3) age-group frictions. However, the most recent upsurge of vitality in national social policy was not amenable to any overall generalization. On the contrary, it seems to me to have had three phases--the "creative chaos" of the poverty war; the phase of faith in master planning (negative income tax, national health insurance, the FAP-revenue sharing combination, etc.); and "regulatory liberalism"--i.e., efforts to achieve social progress at little direct cost to the federal treasury. The New Deal likewise was not a unitary period, and the next social policy cycle may also be expected to evolve in terms of action-reaction dynamics, lessons learned, accidental factors, and its own tendency to run out of steam.

I offer the following conjectures:

1. With an ever-larger part of the population living 1,500-3,000 miles from Washington, it is possible that the country could experience a more than "cyclical" decline in the federal domination of social policy.

2. The 2010-30 "retirement explosion" will still be too remote to influence social-policy formulations and alignments in 1990. The Big Generation will at that time be a majority of the labor force. However, fifteen years later, it will have slipped to minority status.

3. The middle-aging of the Big Generation seems likely to coincide with rough equalization of per capita income and percent poor among U.S. regions. This development will remove major practical obstacles to a sweeping welfare reform by the year

2000, but further delays could result from conflict between the Big and Small Generations over including the Social Security system in a rationalization of income support programs. This is a plausible focal point for acrimonious age-group politics, but it is also easy to imagine more general issues of distributive justice raised, with an age rather than (as recently) an income frame of reference.

D. Implications for the Schools

Much has recently been written about the premature end of "the century of the child," and the ascendancy of a ME Generation that has no time for children. My sense of the next fifteen years does not conform to this line of reasoning. A rising proportion of the working-age population will have children living at home. Interest in the schools will be keen, and the fact that enrollment decline will continue to be associated with rising per-pupil costs should not be allowed to obscure the fact that total costs of the schools will be growing more slowly than in the past, while family income will tend to rise more rapidly as the "age bulge" workers move toward their peak earning years.

The demands that this parental generation makes on the schools will be colored by their own work experiences in a crowded system of advancement. I believe that, in the main, these parents will demand high academic standards, but certainly some will be alienated from the rat-race, and community frictions could result from teachers' preference for this view.

Many high schools will face severe contraction problems, with peak-to-trough declines of thirty percent or more not uncommon in northern states. This development may add impetus to the courts-spurred efforts toward a greater state-level role in school funding, despite the lessened political muscle of the cities.

I do not see the political climate of the 1980s as conducive to expansion of federal regulatory interventions in the conduct of the schools. Indeed, some back-peddling seems more likely in a localistic and not especially liberal political climate. I doubt that extension of the public schools into day care for small children will build up steam. Indeed, in my "New Domesticity" scenario, liberal sentiment would experience a backlash against pressuring welfare mothers to work, asserting their right to stay home (as was ADC's initial purpose) and undercutting a major segment of the subsidized day care market. However, many other multiple uses of high schools will occur, although, if fertility rises, many school boards will be wary of complicating commitments to other community organizations.

Finally, the problem of an aging faculty--although not nearly so severe as in the colleges--will be of increasing concern in areas with severe enrollment decline.